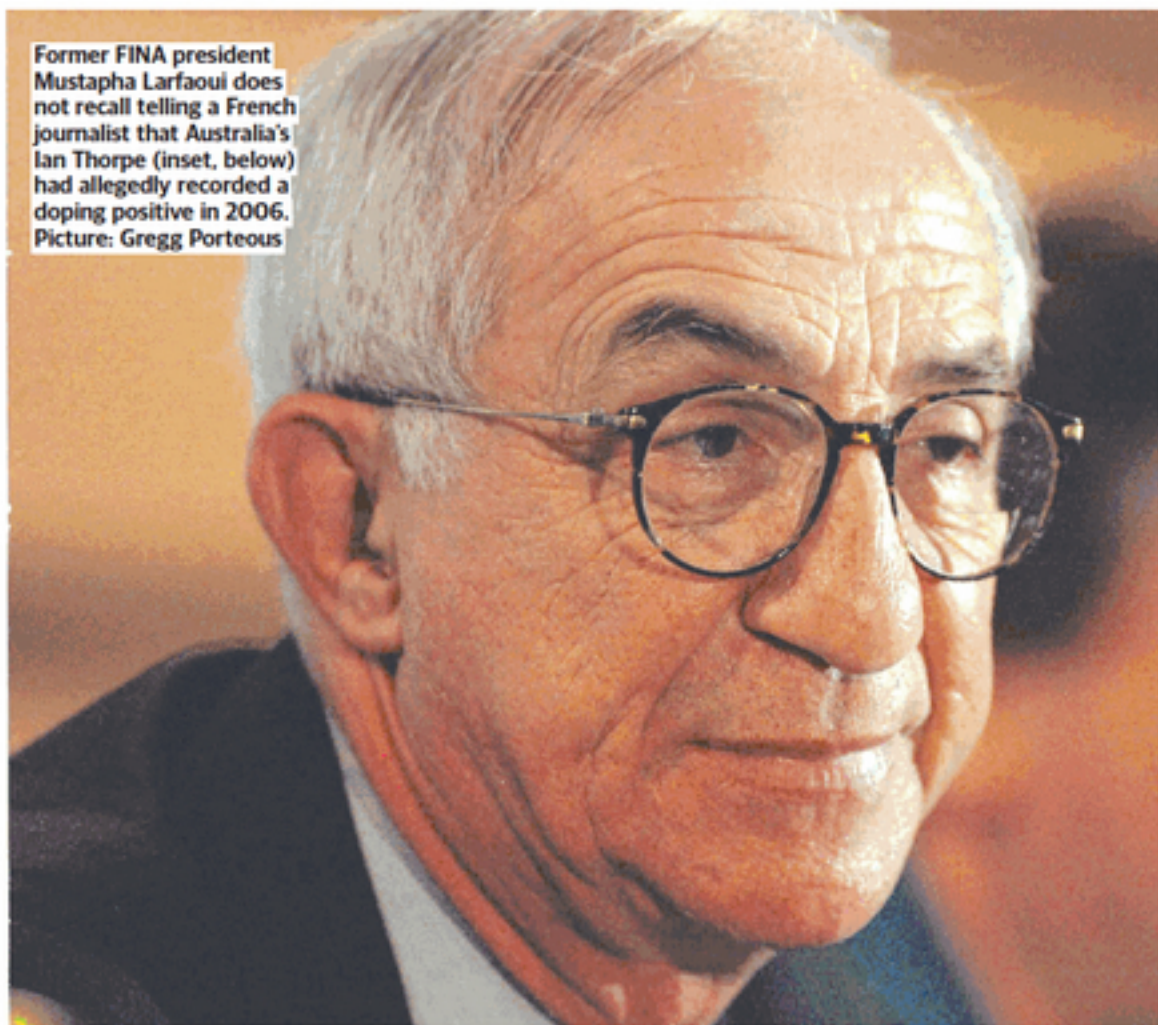




Former FINA president Mustapha Larfaoui does not recall telling a French journalist that Australia's Ian Thorpe (inset, below) had allegedly recorded a doping positive in 2006. Picture: Gregg Porteous



BIG HOLES IN THORPE DRUG 'LEAK'

SPECIAL REPORT

FINA to investigate source of false test positive that tainted superstar

JULIAN LINDEN and CRAIG LORD

WORLD swimming's new boss has called for an independent investigation into the leaking of Ian Thorpe's private medical records from more than a decade ago after explosive new claims that a senior Olympic official was behind the breach.

Swimming's governing body has long been suspected of trying to sabotage Thorpe's career by leaking misinformation about his confidential test results in 2007 — then reneging on a promise to investigate the matter.

But FINA's new president, Husain Al Musallam, who was elected on a platform of reforming and cleaning up the sport's troubled ruling body, said it was not too late to reopen the case and ensure that justice was served.

"Of course I would support an independent investigation," Al Musallam told The Sunday Telegraph.

"It is wrong for anyone to leak any records, that's my principle.

"We have to follow a process ... but if there is any evidence accusing any person, including me, then they should be punished."

Al Musallam's pledge to throw the

book at anyone involved in the leak follows fresh claims the culprit is also a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and served on the executive board of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Independent witnesses have told The Sunday Telegraph that ex-FINA president Mustapha Larfaoui was the Olympic official who allegedly tipped off the French journalist who published the article in L'Equipe.

Speaking exclusively to The Sunday Telegraph, Larfaoui — now 88 — does not deny talking to the reporter, but said he no longer recalls what he told him.

"Sorry, it was 14 years ago," Larfaoui said. "I don't remember well that situation and I don't want to say the wrong thing."

"We are not as young as we were. But, to tell you the truth, I was very happy with my period in FINA and I have good souvenirs and memories."

Larfaoui has always been one of the prime suspects in the unsolved mystery about who leaked Thorpe's confidential results to the French newspaper during the 2007 world championships in Melbourne.

His apparent memory loss is unlikely to garner much sympathy from other leading sports officials because of the important positions he was entrusted with at the time — the presidency of FINA, membership of the IOC and a seat on the executive board at WADA.

The IOC has strict rules about how its members must act, as well as options to independently investigate any members accused of wrongdoing.

Larfaoui was first elected to the IOC in 1995 and while he no longer gets to vote, he remains an honorary member. He is also an honorary life president of FINA.

His perks include an all expenses-paid trip to the Tokyo Olympics.

The Algerian has always denied deliberately trying to smear Thorpe's reputation but, if the allegations are true, the flippant manner in which world swimming's most powerful figure inadvertently leaked the news rules.

It allegedly happened in 2006, at a WADA meeting in Montreal, Canada.

It's claimed that Larfaoui approached a renowned drug-busting journalist from L'Equipe at a reception and proceeded to tell him about a swimmer's private test results.

The unidentified swimmer had returned a sample showing elevated levels of testosterone,

which were proved to have occurred naturally. That meant it was not a violation so the swimmer's identity had to be kept secret.

But the following year in Melbourne, Larfaoui allegedly confirmed to the same journalist that the swimmer involved was Thorpe — which became global front-page news.

In a clear violation of anti-doping protocols, Larfaoui later allegedly explained to his most trusted inner circle at FINA that he was unaware the man he had disclosed the information to was a journalist.

"It is wrong for anyone to leak any records, that's my principle"

Husain Al Musallam

Even if his account were true, that would not absolve Larfaoui's fault because telling anyone amounts to a serious breach of athlete privacy rules.

A closely-guarded secret for years, the alleged details about FINA's role have only just come to light through The Sunday Telegraph's ongoing probe into swimming's murky past.

In confidential documents dating from 2006, Australian anti-doping officials had long held deep reservations about the way FINA conducted itself while the case was being investigated.

Professor Ken Fitch, who was the chairman of the Australian Sports Drug Medical Advisory Committee (ASDMAC) at the time, wrote to the FINA Doping Control Review Board (DCRB) notifying it that a FINA official had "breached confidentiality by advising Swimming Australia of the athlete who remained under investigation but had not returned a positive sample."

It was revealed FINA secretly ordered target tests on Thorpe while he was training in California although his identity was meant to be secret.

When Australian investigators ruled Thorpe had no case to answer, FINA filed two appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Both were thrown out.



Sun sets on doping loophole as FINA gets serious

JULIAN LINDEN | SWIMMING

SWIMMING'S world governing body has begun drafting plans to close the loophole that allowed Sun Yang to keep the two gold medals he received at the 2019 world championship when he should have already been banned from the event.

The Chinese freestyler was controversially allowed to race at the championships after a FINA Doping Panel wrongly cleared him of tampering with his own samples before they could be checked for drugs. FINA's handling of the case was heavily criticised by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which later found Sun guilty and suspended him for more than four

years, ruling him out of the Tokyo Olympics but was powerless to strip him of the medals.

Now, FINA's newly elected president Husain Al Musallam wants to ensure that situation never happens again so is pushing for a radical change to the way FINA deals with doping cases.

Al Musallam revealed that FINA is finally prepared to hand over the investigation of doping issues to a fully independent integrity unit.

Al Musallam said the details are still being finalised by FINA's newly appointed reform committee but he confirmed a recommendation will be made as early as December for approval at the extraordinary congress that has

been arranged in Abu Dhabi to accelerate overdue reforms.

"We need to modernise our doping strategy," Al Musallam said. "I am expecting that the reform committee will make this recommendation for an independent integrity unit for doping and I will support this."

One of the last major international sporting bodies to hand over control of doping matters to an independent body, FINA's sudden change of heart will be welcomed by everyone who supports clean sport.

A former airline pilot from Kuwait, Al Musallam has promised to fix FINA's deep rooted governance problems after being elected unopposed last month as

the sport's president for the next four years.

His announcement to reform follows an investigation by The Sunday Telegraph that lifted the lid on FINA's governance problems and raised serious questions about past leaders.

"It is not enough to have good athletes and good coaches and good officials at the swimming pool," he said.

"Without a good governing body, the whole thing will collapse, so this is the time that we need to come together and talk to each other."

"We need to create a good environment where we work together under the same roof and there is transparency for everyone."



Banned swimmer Sun Yang. Picture: AFP